

Rainbow Airbridge to Bethany Home in Umtata

15th May 2004

Setting up the 4th Rainbow flight proved to be a little harder than expected. We had planned the trip for the Saturday 15th May and getting donated product was a little harder to come by. Both Mike and I worked frantically to get enough to fill the volunteered aircraft. In the end we purchased some of the needed supplies with donated funds.



The available aircraft were a Cherokee and two Cessna 182's. Having loaded the Cherokee at FAGC and sent Lloyd McKay (who hails from Umtata) on his way we had to wait for Jeremy Guimarens, the pilot of the second 182 who was delayed by an early morning mist at Wonderboom. Jeremy finally made it into Grand Central just after 10am and by the time we had completed loading and the necessary paperwork in respect of flight plans it was going to be a tight turnaround to make the return leg before dark.



Once cleared JHB, the TMA boundary and flying in loose formation we climbed to altitude and left the smog behind us - blue skies and the still winter atmosphere provided the perfect conditions for the flight to Umtata via Estcourt and Underburg. The view of the towering Drakensburg never fails to excite and release a little more adrenaline into ones system.

We touched down at Umtata just 3hrs later and after unloading managed to get Jeremy refueled and on his way home for the return journey. Mike and I decided to stay over as we wanted to visit the our beneficiary, Sister Mary Paul and the Bethany Home. Lloyd and his wife, Brenda who had initially put us in touch with Bethany, kindly invited us to stay the night.



Bethany Home which looks after 58 abandoned children, ages ranging from a few months to 6 years old, is run by Sister Mary Paul and is situated just outside Umtata. To think that without Bethany, these children would be without shelter leaves one knowing just how lucky most of us are. Sister Paul was really grateful for the 550 kg of supplies which included over 1000 nappies, blankets, and nutritional supplements. Her assistants and volunteer workers, from the UK and Lichtenstein, need to be congratulated on the good work they are doing. The visit amplified the plight of the poor and especially the helpless children. Mike again was tasked to capture the events on film.



Sunday dawned with low cloud, mist and scud, contrary to the weather report that had given a 9999 for visibility. A late start ensued with Mike and I having to find our way through some tricky weather, and having to track via Zastron and the Freestate for home. For once we had a tail wind of some 30-35 kts at altitude and achieved speeds in excess of 160kts.

Thanks to our sponsors Dischem, Nutrix, and BP, that's another successful Rainbow mission in terms of aid delivered to the needy and judging from the pilots comments this was probably their biggest flying experience to date.



Report by Ernie Alexander